

Surprise! You're Now A Care Giver

Written by Jodi Cz, Caregiver

Edited by Zanda Hilger, on behalf of Caregiver Education programs

When Mom's husband passed away, I knew our lives would never be the same. Mom was 63 years old when she came to live with us—my husband just turned 43 and I 42. I was excited about all of the fun we would have together. My anticipation soon turned to anger and frustration as I realized that we were in over our heads. We didn't have a clue how to be "care givers."

It's been an uphill battle as we have tried to "change" the way Mom does things. Our goal has been to keep her safe and healthy. I was so wrapped up in this new role that I quit living my own life.

We faced many challenges from deciding how to handle Mom's finances and health to her social activities and every day living. We kept expecting Mom to know what her own needs were even though she was not capable. Her Multiple Sclerosis, dementia, loss of hearing as well as grieving the changes in her life were presenting road blocks for all of us.

After struggling for almost three years, I realized we needed help. We had to learn more about our role as "care givers" and how to deal with the changes in Mom's emotions and behavior. The Director of the Senior Center, where we take Mom a couple of times a week, referred us to the Area Agency on Aging (AAA).

We began attending caregiver education classes and then began seeing a counselor referred by the Area Agency on Aging. We learned that we needed to change the way we communicated with Mom and treat her like an adult instead of like a child. We were reminded that we can do too much for our elderly parents to the point where they become totally dependent upon us. Educational classes and counseling gave us insight as to our role as "caregivers."

One of my frustrations is that Mom argues with me. It was suggested that it's time for me to "step off of the dance floor." When the frustration begins to build, I need to take a deep breath and walk away. Another important lesson is to be "silent"—I don't always have to respond to Mom.

Our job is to provide Mom with a safe and healthy environment at the highest level of independence. She needs the freedom to live her life to the best of her ability. Mom cannot process information at a fast pace so we have to learn to slow down. This is a challenge given our fast paced lives and jobs.

We were encouraged to see what we could learn from Mom like taking life as it comes; enjoying life; and, taking pleasure in the little things. The biggest lesson we have learned from her so far is to take one day at a time and truly live in the moment. Our AAA counselor reminded us that "care giving takes courage—it's not for the weak hearted."

Meals-on-Wheels of Johnson and Ellis Counties

For information about home-delivered meals, help with transportation, or to schedule a caregiver seminar or presentation at your library, church, company, or group:

Call (817) 558-2840 or (972) 351-9943 email info@mowjec.org